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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EU](#) [GR](#) [INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: GREECE: MARCH DATE FOR EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION VOTE;
IMMIGRATION REFORM IN THE WORKS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES P. RIES FOR REASONS 1.4(B/D)

1. (C) Summary. The Greek government will submit the European Constitution to parliament for ratification in March, Interior Minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos told Ambassador February 16. The government also plans to introduce immigration reform legislation that would regularize the status of thousands of illegal migrants and, over time, encourage many to return to their home countries. End Summary.

Parliament to Bless EU Constitution in March

2. (C) The Greek government will submit the European constitution to parliament for ratification in March, Interior Minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos told Ambassador February 16. Under Greek law, parliamentary approval is all that is needed to ratify the constitution. Pavlopoulos claimed this would make Greece the first EU member to ratify the treaty. (Note: He may have been thinking in terms of the pre-enlargement EU; we understand Hungary and Lithuania have already done so.) With no tradition of Euroskepticism in Greece and little domestic opposition to the constitution, Pavlopoulos said, the parliament should approve the constitution without controversy. Of the parties represented in parliament, only the small Communist Party of Greece opposes the EU constitution. The government's main reason for moving quickly was concern that, if ratification were pushed into the summer or later, the vote might become entangled with Turkey's EU accession talks set to begin in October.

Major Immigration Reform in the Works

3. (C) Pavlopoulos noted that the government planned to introduce immigration reform legislation within two weeks, in an effort to address what he termed an anarchic situation in the country. The draft legislation was designed to give the government greater control over aliens entering the country and to prevent visitors from changing status and seeking employment after entry. The law would also unify Greece's residence and work permits, ending the current situation, in which decisions over work and residence permits are made separately (and by regional or municipal authorities). Naturalization rules would be simplified, he said, making it easier for non-native Greeks to obtain citizenship.

4. (C) Finally, the legislation also would implement the EU's voluntary repatriation program, called Aeneas, offering illegal migrants start up money to return to their home countries. Pavlopoulos said the government's expectations for the program were modest in the short term, but the longer-term outlook was good. Greek efforts to improve the economic situation in supply countries, particularly Albania, as well as additional measures to increase the incentives to return, would hopefully lead to more voluntary repatriations over time.

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